

Meeting Report
Tenant Work Group
Thursday, November 13, 2008
6:30-8:30pm
Executive Conference Room
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Work Group Members in attendance:

Alice Wilkerson, Chuck Short, Dale Tibbitts, Dawn Wunderle, Felicia Eberling, Guy Johnson, Harrietta Kelly, Matt Losak, Maureen Ross, Rick Nelson, Zack Fried

Staff participants:

Megan Moriarty, IMPACT Silver Spring
Patrice Cheatham, DHCA

Minutes:

Matt Losak opened the meeting at 6:40pm and welcomed the group to the first meeting. Chuck Short passed on the County Executive's appreciation for the members' participation in this important, work group. He continued that the Executive would like the group to formulate specific, short-term recommendations as well as suggestions that could lay the groundwork for long-term institutionalization of tenant advocacy in the County.

Chuck and Matt also clarified a few housekeeping matters: meetings are public and each meeting will have a 5 minute section reserved at the end for public comment; IMPACT Silver Spring is providing staff support to the group; each work group member may designate a proxy if they are not able to attend, but there will be only one vote per group member; press requests should be directed to Matt.

Matt noted that the Office of the County Executive issued a press release announcing the formation of the TWG.

Chuck proposed the inclusion of a representative of the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center. TWG members unanimously supported this proposal.

The group then reviewed the mission statement and brainstormed research ideas for each point. Following is a list of the ideas generated:

Accurately identify and quantify common and substantive problems confronting renters:

- No protections for renters living in foreclosed homes
- No-fault evictions
- Rent increases
- Extra fees for month-to-month leases
- Code enforcement

- Conflict resolution - mediation between landlords and tenants
- Safety
- Communication between landlords and tenants
- Lack of affordable housing and reductions in government programs
- No sense of security
- Retaliatory evictions
- Harassment
- Communication with the County
- Understanding landlord and tenant responsibilities
- Language barriers
- Economic viability of owning rental units
- Understanding details of leases
- Hard to organize tenant groups
- High cost of utilities
- How utilities are divided
- Lack of codified tenant rights
- Local, state, federal laws
- Energy conservation
- Cost of cable
- Cable regulation and choice
- Cultural sensitivity
- Absentee landlords
- Parking
- HOC allocations
- Discrimination
- Condo conversions
- Landlords wanting to sell and not notifying renters
- Occupancy standards
- Eviction and use of courts
- Security deposits
- Pathways to ownership
- Housing/jobs mismatch

Research best practices and successful tenant advocacy models:

- Models from similar counties
- Landlord-tenant structures and practices
- Institutionalized structures
- Programs with successful track records
- Outreach and education models
- Programs that successfully deal with diversity
- Mixed-income housing models
- Community land trusts and land trusts
- Maintaining affordability
- Transit-oriented development
- Tenant purchase models
- Providing access to public transportation
- Relationships between civic associations and tenant organizations

- Tenant advocacy organizations' fundraising models

Review local and state codes:

- Housing code
- Landlord-tenant code
- Health code
- Noise regulations
- Breaking your lease
- Case law on common tenant issues
- Landlord-tenant commission
- History of tenant legislation in Maryland and Montgomery County
- Zoning laws (accessory apartments and private living quarters)

Catalogue available resources for renters:

- DHCA, DHHS
- Non-profits (local and national)
- HUD
- State of Maryland
- Local municipalities
- Landlords, management companies
- Culturally specific resources

Seek public input:

- Public meetings around the County
- Email, website input
- Providing information to public
- Press
- Bringing in experts on certain subjects and those with connections to specific communities or populations
- Outreach to businesses that employ renters
- Tenant survey
- Targeted outreach

After brainstorming, the group discussed how to proceed and begin working on the ideas generated. Work groups and sub-committees were discussed, as well as paired outreach to seek public input and heavy reliance on email between meetings. It was agreed that before the next meeting each member would review the list of ideas, organize the issues into broader themes and then prioritize those themes. Megan and Matt will compile those lists and use that as the basis for conversation at the next meeting when the group decides what to focus on first.

The TWG agreed to schedule the next two meetings on Tuesday, November 25, 6:30-8:30pm and Tuesday, December 9, 6:30-8:30pm.

Matt adjourned the meeting at 8:30pm.